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Subject: Conceit.

# PLYMOUTH PULPIT:

A Weekly Publication

OF

## SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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THE SERMONS  
OF  
HENRY WARD BEECHER,  
IN  
*Plymouth Church, Brooklyn.*

FROM VERBATIM REPORTS BY T. J. ELLINWOOD.

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## PREFACE.

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It is difficult to make a special introduction to each volume of these current Sermons, since the separate volumes are not made up with any special end in view. They simply comprise, each, one-half of the sermons preached by me during the six months covered by twenty-six numbers of *Plymouth Pulpit*, the weekly Pamphlet publication of them.

The reporting and selection of them for publication fall to other hands than mine. I can, therefore, only bear witness to the fidelity of the record and the evenness with which it represents the course of my teachings.

HENRY WARD BEECHER.





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## CONCEIT.

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"Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him."—PROV. XXVI, 12.

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There is very little hope of a fool; and if a man who is conceited is worse off than that, he is badly off indeed.

The opinion of Solomon is not shared by men very generally. Conceit is very much in repute, and very widely prevalent; and people who are conceited by no means think that they are fools. They think that Solomon was one.

What is this conceit? Men are thought to be conceited who are positive; but that is by no means what is meant by conceit. A man of an intense nature, and a clear-cut understanding, sees precisely, when he sees at all, and he *knows* what he knows, and seems, oftentimes, to be opinionated and conceited. He may be opinionated, but that is not necessarily being conceited. Nor are we to suppose that every man who is over-confident is conceited. That may spring from hopefulness. A man's buoyant temperament, a man's sanguine disposition, leads him oftentimes into conceit, and, as a general thing, there is very little in his experience to correct it. There are some men who, if you throw them down and leave them, get up again. They are like an india-rubber ball, which, no matter how much you compress it, resumes the same shape and elasticity still. There are some men who, no matter what happens to them, retain their original characteristics. And ordinarily an over-sanguine man, who is hopeful to his damage, remains so; and his life is a series of ups and downs, of successes and disasters, closely connected.

If it were not for these men, society would be very apt to stand still. They are pioneers. They go before. And their disasters and successes are so many lessons to those who come after them. The bankruptcy and failure of sanguine men has, in thousands of instances, pointed out to successors the right way to go. As in a narrow channel, one ship, going before, and running aground, becomes a warning to other ships that run into the same channel; so many men, going before in life, and making mistakes, become warnings to those who follow behind them.



Again, there are persons who have the appearance of being conceited, on account of simple courage and an energetic temperament. They affirm and they feel with an immense deal more pressure of blood to the square inch, if I may so say, than their fellows do and it gives them something of a towering and dictatorial way, and men say that they are conceited.

A man is conceited who has an opinion of himself, of his abilities, and of his deeds, which is quite disproportionate to any fair measurement or judgment of him. There are a great many conceited persons who are the subjects of much wit and *badinage* behind their back, and who are very harmlessly conceited. There are a great many persons who have an overweening estimate of themselves. Everything in the world is thought of by them in relation to themselves. You may start any subject you please; and in less than a minute they will get off from that subject and commence talking about themselves. All creation runs to a center; and they are the center. They love to talk about themselves, and they love to hear other people talk about them. The one thermometric test of everything, is *how it affects them*. And you will frequently see such persons, in all their intercourse with their fellow-men, have an innocent, a sometimes unconscious, and a sometimes conscious conceit. They move about, and people, smiling, look after them, and say all manner of uncomplimentary things of them, sometimes bitterly, and sometimes amiably.

Although this conceit is really a great weakness, yet it is not that kind of damaging conceit which Scripture speaks of, and of which I shall speak to-night.

It is a great weakness for a man to have this constitutional vanity, this overweening, intense estimate of himself, but still, if he conforms to the great laws of life, if he conforms to the great moral and intellectual laws of his being, he will go successfully and safely on through life, although with some abatement to dignity, and some abatement to reputation. For, when everybody sees that a man is taking care of his own reputation, and of himself, there is no sympathy with him. Men let him take care of his reputation and of himself, and do not help him to do it, under such circumstances.

The first form of conceit of which I shall speak, and which comes under the condemnatory passage I have read, is that which usually breaks out at the point of transition, where the young are just passing from subordination in youth to self-government in manhood. This mischievous conceit is that which leads men to set aside established formula, to override experience, and substantially to be skeptical of the great laws of cause and effect as they stand related to moral and intellectual development in life. In many a

generous nature—indeed, perhaps, in most—the transition from subordination and family discipline to independency, is made through a period of conceit, in which the young man and maiden no longer tolerate government. It irks them to be reproved or commanded. They will not have advice. They grow sulky and ugly, and are a torment to themselves and everybody that loves them. They know more—they are sure they do—than the other folks that live in the house. They know more than their father and their mother do. They admit that the old folks did very well for old times; but then they live in new times, and, being young folks, they catch the rising spirit of the coming day; and they do not think it fair that they should be held to conformity to the old ways. And so very excellent young men continue to make themselves intolerable for a short period. It seems as though young people have to go through this period, just as children have to go through chicken-pox, and measles, and rash, and all other little diseases of that kind which break out once, and then are over with.

If this matter stops early, if a change takes place with some of the first experiences of practical life, it is well. If not, the beginnings of the end are frequently found. At just this point there are many who make fatal steps, and begin with a downfall from which they never recover themselves. In innumerable persons this rash of conceit breaks out at the very threshold of their manhood. But in many natures it is very much like the prancing and frisking of an untamed colt; and the harness and the road are the cure. There has been many a young man who was intolerably conceited until he was put soundly to work, and responsibilities were laid upon him, and cares began to be a part of his daily food. Then he began to feel that other men did know more than he, that there is some use in counsel, and that to have some one wiser and stronger to lean upon is indeed a great blessing and a great mercy. Now this temporary conceit of youth is comparatively a weakness, rather than a sin and a crime, as other forms of conceit are.

Another class of conceited persons are those who find themselves constrained in their country life, and feel that they have not room in which to develop all the talents which God has committed to their charge. There are a great many youth in the country, well bred at home, who would grow up to be respectable men—farmers, mechanics, or professional men—in their own region round about, but who feel the spirit of a hundred men in them, and think that the country is not large enough, and that they must emigrate to the city. The city is the place for a man to find his fortune, they think.

Far be it from me to say that every man is bound to vegetate

where the seed sprouted, and that no man may go from the country to the city, or from the city to the country. I would not be understood as saying that there shall be no circulation. I merely animadvert upon those who have this contumescient feeling that there is not room enough in the country for them to display the treasure of their talents in. They come down to the city, thousands and thousands more than the city wants. It is a pitiful thing to see the enormous pressure there is at every open door of ordinary pursuits, and the overcrowded state of the city. It would promote the morals of the nation if the city were to vomit out one-third of its young population. They are not wanted. They trample each other down in the dust in their competitions. During not more than one-third of the year can half the force be employed. During the rest of the time, Heaven knows how they get a living. Not always reputably nor honestly—certainly not in a manly spirit. And yet, more are perpetually coming from the country to the city.

If a man be tough, if a man have two men's force, he may go from the country into the city and do well; but of all places on earth for dependent men, for men of a weak nerve, for men that are not elastic and enduring, the city is the worst. It grinds up weak men as the mill grinds wheat. It is the last place that they should go to. But hither they come in countless multitudes, having the impression that in the city fortunes go around begging persons to take them; that in the city treasures hang like grapes in a vineyard over a trellis, and may be had by stretching out the hand. They come to the city feeling that nimbleness and smartness will certainly win here. How many, many there are, who come down annually to fall into the pit! The most mournful thing in city life is the continuous destruction of young men and maidens. Because it is so hidden from our eyes, because it is so gradual, that we do not perceive the stages of it, we are shocked. But if a single case should be selected, and we should see, as in a dream, the enactment which takes place, first from virtue to weakness and vice, and then on to wickedness and crime, that one instance would fill us with horror. And there are hundreds and thousands of instances which we think nothing about, simply because they are so much hidden. We know that they are taking place; we know that multitudes, green and callow, come to the cities, and in the remorseless maw of vice and crime are consumed. As the larger fishes eat up and destroy the smaller ones, so this great whale-city ingurgitates and digests multitudes and multitudes of the young men that were brought hither by conceit; by an overweening self-confidence; by an impression that they had the capacity, the power, to succeed; by an inordinate sense of their importance, and of their faculty and skill for



getting along in the world. And borne hither by this conceit, they are destroyed ere long, and their fragments are spewed out; and that is all that there is of their life.

Then there are those who perish by conceit because they assume that they can succeed in life on the principle of good luck, instead of by a recognition of and obedience to the great law of equivalents. The law of God in this world, is, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap;" and the apostle declares that "God is not mocked." Conceit declares that God *can* be mocked. And there are ten thousand young men in this city to-day, and in the great city adjoining, who are just as sure as can be that they are going to cheat Providence. Others fail, to be sure; but then, they were not as smart as these are. They did not know as much! They were not as cunning nor shrewd, nor deft, nor lucky! There are multitudes who believe that they can sow idleness, and reap abundance; that they can sow carelessness, and have the products of care; that they can sow self-indulgence, and get that which only comes from frugality and economy, and enterprise, and industry, the longest continued. There are multitudes of men who believe that they can squander their passions, double-handed, and throw away their life, and yet gather all, and garner all. There are multitudes of persons who come down to the city, feeling, not that they are going to make their fortune by the closest attention to business. Oh no! That is no part of their intent. They mean to do just as little as they can. They mean to elude detection just as long as they can. They believe that they can live a double life. They believe that they can live a life, capacious and deep, of licence and licentiousness, covered with a sort of cream of higher qualities. In that lower life their blood is to circulate. There all their nerves are to be played upon with infinite joys, varying from day to day, and above that they are going to have a little bit of a life of respectability and morality. They are going to show their employers, and other people, that they can live in the indulgence of their lower faculties and sensuous nature, while they keep up a better life on the surface. There are thousands of men who live for the gratification of their selfishness, their lusts and appetites, their animalism, and are conceited enough to believe that they are going to succeed in life in the wicked game that they are playing. They think they can succeed by cheating their employers, cheating the world, and cheating God. They think they can succeed though they turn their days into pleasure, and their nights into dissipation. They are going to do as little as they can; and that little they are going to do to their own advantage; and by their deftness they are going to set at naught the canons of strict honesty and honor, and are going to be glittering, and brilliant, and happy. They are not

going to read nor to study much. They are somehow going to be wise through their smartness. They are going to succeed in life by their wits. More than that, they are going to do just what their heart wants to do, and just what their flesh wants to do. And they think they are going to dodge all the nets and snares which are set to harm and destroy them. They think that somehow or other they are going to maintain the reputation of being virtuous and honorable men, at the same time that they are practicing dishonorable and unvirtuous habits. God says to them, "Thou fool!"

"Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him."

I see shops crowded with just such young men; I see stores crowded with them; I see offices crowded with them—young men who are trying by ignominious ways to maintain themselves. They believe that they will be able to cheat God, and that what they sow they shall not reap. They are going to sow chaff and reap wheat, in their judgment.

It is the want of manliness, it is the want of moral stamina, it is the want of a wise discrimination on the part of young men, that makes the name *clerk* so often a name of contempt. The business is right: it is the miserable conceit of the shallow-pated, and the unlearned, and the unvirtuous, that makes it disreputable.

I would that men could learn to believe a few things which all history has been busy establishing. Industry is the beginning of prosperity. Frugality is the handmaid of industry. Temperance and self-restraint are the indispensable concomitants of prosperity. He that means to prosper must pay for whatever he gets. I do not mean in money. There is another counter over which men take their goods. If a man is to have learning, he must give an equivalent of study for it. If a man is to have an experience, he must give an equivalent of application for it. If a man is going to have a character, he has got to earn or pay for that character. And no man will ever prosper in this world by luck, unless it be by the luck of getting up early, and working hard, and maintaining honor and integrity. Prosperity gained in any other way will be a delusion and a snare to every young man.

Conceit carries men far beyond these bounds which I have marked out. Although the testimony of experience is that no man can carry a coal in his bosom and not be burned, or touch pitch and not be defiled, there are multitudes (and every year the ranks are filled up as they drop off) who are conceited, and believe that they are a match for knaves and knavery; that they are a match for seduction and seducers. Multitudes tread along the path where there are skeletons innumerable of men who have been destroyed, and yet they do not believe that they are going to be destroyed. Many young men, going to the

door of the lazar-house, have seen heaped up there corpses of men that have been destroyed; and yet, vainly confident of their own safety, they have gone in, to perish likewise. If men would take warning from that which meets them at the doors of gambling saloons, and the myriad other places where thousands upon thousands are swallowed up and destroyed, instead of listening to the voice of their conceit, what multitudes would be saved who are now lost! But they are bound to try their luck. "What is the harm of an innocent game of cards?" say young men to us. No harm in and of itself; but there is harm in the associations which surround it; in the society into which it draws one, and in the desire which it excites in men for unjust and unlawful gains. For every man is a gambler who seeks to get money without giving a fair equivalent for it, whether he be gambling for stocks or anything else. And yet men think they can avoid being affected by these associations, and this society, and these provocations. Though others fail, they think they will not fail. But how many that think so do fail!

I know a man in this town who was worth seventy or eighty thousand dollars, which he had acquired by sound industry; but eighty thousand dollars was just enough to kindle in him an insatiable desire for wealth. The spirit of avarice took possession of him, and he must needs go into "the street." He entered upon a course for which he had not been trained; and when he came out, instead of having increased his eighty thousand to five hundred thousand, as he meant to do, he had lost it all, and was penniless. And then, to cover his disgrace he became a drunkard. Conceit took him in, and disaster kicked him out.

How many young men there are who, though old heads warn them, and though there are thousands that have been destroyed in the same path that they are about to enter, as they might see if they would open their eyes, yet press forward, and say, "Oh! a faint heart never won a fair lady. Nothing venture, nothing have. I will try." The feeling is just this: "Ten thousand men fail because they were not as smart as I. Now look, and see me go into the street and make money." And men do look and see them go into the street; and they see them come out of the street again crest-fallen, plucked, drooping, dishonored, discouraged, all because they made fools of themselves at the beginning, by being too conceited. They are double fools, because they not only were conceited at the beginning, but are disappointed and crushed at the end.

Not only do men gamble, but they resort to gambling houses through curiosity. There is not a young man who has not heard about the dangers of these places. All young men have heard their



parents and their neighbors talk about, and have read about in the newspapers, and known about personally, cases of young men who have gone from the country to the city, and lost their money by mock auctions, and thimble-riggers, and other swindling operations; and yet multitudes of these same young men go down to the city, and in their conceit, think they can go in the midst of things, gratify their curiosity, and escape—and are caught like so many gudgeons. They are caught and plucked, in their greenness, because they are so conceited. Men go into gambling saloons, knowing all about them, knowing that that they are traps and delusions. They know that an old trained gambler is a match for five hundred unsophisticated young men; and yet they pit themselves against him. With all his experience, with all his craft, with all his secret arrangements, with all his organized knavery, you would say that it was impossible for anybody to make head against him. A man may have some chance in a game of chance, but in gambling saloons chances are not allowed. A man who gambles for a living is nothing but an incarnate thief, a cunning thief, a perpetual thief—first, last and all the time a thief. And his business is to steal. He has made stealing a profession, and is practiced in it. He is acquainted with men's dispositions, and knows how to take them. And here comes in one of these green young men. He is exactly like a little fly exploring a big black-bellied spider's web, that says, "It does not look as though there was very much to be afraid of here; I do not see anything that I cannot manage; at any rate, I will try," and pitches in. And after he is once in, you hear one faint buzz, and that is the end of him!

There are thousands of conceited young men who come down to the city, oh! so shrewd; oh! so smart; oh! so confident of their ability to go into danger and come out without being harmed. They are eager to measure themselves with the men who go to these places. They go to the theater, and nudge their companions, and say, "What would the old man think if he saw me here? What would Aunt Sal say? Would not they think it strange?" And so they jeer and laugh. And when they come out of the theater they think they would like to have company, so they go home with company. They are so smart that they think they are not in danger! There is nobody else that is so keen as they are! They feel secure. And they go into the house of death. And there they are wrought upon by drugged wines and drugged courtesies; and the dart strikes through their liver. They were so wise that they thought they could meddle with pitch and not be defiled.

"The lips of a strange woman drop as an honey-comb, and her mouth is smoother than oil; but her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death, her steps take hold on hell."

The house of the strange woman is a deep pit, and multitudes of these conceited young men fall into it. They think they can be wicked with impunity, and they venture, and are slain. It is a house of darkness, it is a house of perpetual death, and thousands upon thousands, in long, groaning processions, go in.

Oh! that when men come to the front door, some angel would take them to the back door, and let them see those come out, who went in blossoming in the beauty of early manhood. Oh! that men could see the certain end of these ways from the beginning. Oh! that they could see the ghastly skeletons, the pallid cheeks, the leaden eyes, the rotting bones, the consuming marrow, the hideous outcome of such a life! But ten thousand men perish because they deem themselves so smart; because they are confident that, however many may have perished, they are not going to perish.

"Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him."

There are a great many of these conceited men listening to this sermon to-night. There are a great many that ought to listen to it. It is high time that you heard some one speak on these subjects. Your friends at home do not know what you are doing; and your friends in the city are encouraging you to go in wrong ways; and there is no faithful voice to tell you the truth to your face, and say, "Thou art the man!" I say to many that are here to-night, You have begun the career of a fool. You are attempting to play double. You are attempting to live an unvirtuous life and reap all the safety of a virtuous life. You are attempting to counteract those great laws of God, those great moral laws, which are as absolute and real as the law of gravitation and the laws of light and heat, and yet reap the blessings which can only come from obedience to those laws. You have begun to live in ways which, if you continue in them, will lead you to death; for they are ways the ends of which are death. And I beseech of you to stop while there is time to stop.

When a man has, every day, the testimony of his conscience that he has done as well as he knew, that he has avoided all known evil, and clung to that which he knew to be right, he is safe; but if a man deviates, and goes into courses that are wrong, he has to be on his guard all the time, he never knows when he is safe, he has committed himself entirely to luck and chance.

I have seen just such things as these. I have been here, now, over twenty years, and I have seen four or five generations of young men ruined. It only takes from about four to seven years to ruin a man. This is about the gradation. A young man comes down to the city, from a very good family, and from a village Sunday-school. He is an

amiable, gentle, sweet-faced, kind-hearted, well-meaning young man. That is the first picture or vision that we have.

The next vision that we have is, that the old home-made cloth is gone; that the plain, clumsy roundabout is exchanged for the nice, trig coat. And now he wears a flashing, flaming pin, and all manner of ornaments. His salary is small, but then, he must *dress*. He is a perfect Adonis. You can see by the last touches which he has put on, that he thinks himself to be a pink of perfection, and that he has made the most of himself, and the most of his time. And people say of him, "He has blossomed out."

The third vision that we have, is, a certain flush across the cheek; a certain audacious look; a fire in the eye; an intense manner; a something that suggests a man of pleasure. He is now a man that knows his "p's and q's." He knows what life is. He knows how things go in this world. He is the subject of much praise, and fools look up and envy him.

The scene shifts once more. The fourth vision which we have, is, that the man begins to find the world going against him. He has not been so fortunate latterly as he was formerly, and everybody begins to talk about him. People, now that he is going down, instead of praising him as they did when he was prosperous, turn against him, and say, "When such a man goes down, he never goes up again." The difference between a good man and a bad man, is, that when a good man falls he shall rise again from his very health and elasticity; but when a bad man falls, he is like a rotten apple, that, falling, smashes all to pieces, and cannot be put together again. A man runs through this career: first the period of blooming youth; then the period of fast degradation; then the indulgent period, and then the fourth period—that of decadence, when he begins to feel that he is sliding down. He was the confidential clerk of his employer; but he has been put down, down, and he has taken more and more to dissipation.

Then comes the fifth period. The man has the delirium tremens. And soon he comes to the end of his career. He dies a miserable wreck. He reaps the fruit of that which he has sown.

This is going on right before men's eyes; and yet, they are conceited; and they go straight on in the steps of those who have perished, and do the same things, and know it, and say, "They were not shrewd enough to avoid the dangers of the way, but I, being wiser than they, will escape harm. They were slain, but I shall not be slain."

"Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him."

Nowhere else is this more marked than in the security which



men fancy they can work out while in the participation of intoxicating drinks. There is no other phenomenon more striking than the enormous waste of life through intemperance, and the inconceivable conceit of men in regard to drinking. A young man can scarcely be persuaded that any of the evils which come from the use of intoxicating drinks will fall upon him. A young man begins with the wine-cup in social parties; and he will drink, not because he loves wine (it is the testimony of all who drink that in the beginning they never drink because they like spirituous liquors), but always for some other reason; and he soon acquires a taste for it; and that taste grows; and at length it becomes his master; and finally it ruins him, both body and soul—both for this world and for the world to come.

This spectral drama passes right before the eyes of young men, many, and many and many a time; and yet, they will step into the ranks, they will take the same cup, they will enter upon the same career, they will make the same excuses, they will fall into the same presumption, and they will come to the same end. And others will be found springing up to take their places. And these will follow in the same path, and contract the same habits, and make the same plea, and come to the same death. And still others will take their places, and go right through the same career.

So it goes on, not in fives and tens, but literally in hundreds and thousands; and you cannot persuade men that they run a risk in drinking. They will reason about other people's drinking, and point out the fallacy of other people's conceptions, and show where other people were too venturesome, and exhort other people to moderation; and yet they will not believe that there can be any danger in their case.

"Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him."

Men think that intoxicating drinks will do them no harm. They know that such drinks are not necessary for any man in health; they know that in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases in a thousand they are more likely to do harm than good to men in health; they know that where the use of them is beneficial it is an extreme case; and yet they will invariably say, "It will do me no harm. I would caution men not to touch it, but it will not hurt me." More than that, they will say, "The dangers that others have fallen into can, by a discreet and right order of things, be prevented. Just as soon as I see that it is doing me any harm I can stop it." But they do not know what they are saying when they make this assertion. I have heard men talk about leaving off bad habits. I have heard men, for instance, say that they could stop the use of tobacco—and they could till they tried it! I have

known men to try it, and, after a wretched abstinence of one, two, three, four, or five days, begin to chew again. And when I said, "Why did not you stop?" they replied, "Well, I could have stopped, but I thought I would not!" I have known cases of persons who, in order to lay aside chewing, commenced smoking—which is not supposed to be so bad; and the result was that they smoked and chewed both. And sometimes men have undertaken to leave the cigar and the quid, and wind off with snuffing, and have ended with snuffing and chewing and smoking, all three. Again, and again, and again, such men will say, "If it were necessary I could leave it off;" but when they acknowledge the necessity of leaving it off, and try, they always fail.

And that which is true of narcotic stimulants of this kind, is still more signally true of drink. When we take into consideration the fact that by drink the muscular structure is changed, and a state of things is introduced into the constitution which men have no knowledge of, and which does not leave the question to their own will whether they shall or shall not, we can understand how it is that so many fail who earnestly desire and try to abstain from indulgence in intoxicating drink. Now and then there is a strong man who is able, by the exertion of his will, to lay it aside; but those who have not the stamina which he has, are unable to do it. The majority of men have not this power; and yet, every man assures you that he has it, and that intoxicating drink acts on him in such a way that he can stop drinking whenever he pleases to. But let no one delude himself with any such idea. There may be in you a hereditary taint, that answers to powder, which, if a spark falls upon it, will instantly explode. If you keep powder from fire, it will not do any harm; and if you keep away from temptation to drink you will be safe; but if you go where you are tempted, you are in imminent danger. Many a man carries in him an organic, hereditary propensity to drink. If this propensity can be shielded from certain excitements, he will go all his life long sound and wholesome; but if it is brought into certain conditions of pressure, it will develop into an insanity for drink, into intoxication, into drunkenness. And no man who takes the cup, and begins to drink, needlessly, rashly, foolishly, can tell what sleeping devil is in him that will be awakened by this bad practice. And to say that you can stop when tens of thousands have tried it and failed, is to prove yourselves conceited.

"Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him."

But in another respect men are conceited. Passing from the conceit which leads men into vices and crimes, let us look at conceit in those aspects which relate to a man's conscience, faith, hope, devo-

tion. Men are conceited in regard to religious truth, and in regard to their interest in religious things. There are a great many who are believers in the Word of God, and in the essential truths which have been evoked from that word. There are a great many who go wrong, yet never lose their faith in the Scriptures; but there are multitudes of persons who have, through conceit, abandoned all faith, so that they believe in nothing. I know nothing that is more unhappy, nothing that is more fatal, nothing that is more unmanly, than the want of faith. I do not blame a man who, having been educated in one school, adopts the views of truth which are held by another school. If a man, having been born a Protestant, goes into the Catholic Church, under the conviction that that Church is right, though I do not go with him, I can understand how he can make the change, and be sincere and manly. He substitutes one set of affections for another. The main thing is that a man shall believe something which will govern his life. I can understand how a man reared in orthodox views can take on the latter liberal views. I can understand how a man educated in liberal views can take on more stringent and orthodox views. It is merely changing one set of affections for another. That which I reprobate is, the sliding of men out from under all religious convictions, and their letting go everything, and for reasons so unworthy, being founded neither upon manhood, nor investigation, nor knowledge, but upon simple conceit.

How many young men do I hear say, "I do not believe a word of all the doctrines, and I do not believe the Book itself!" Did they ever read one single treatise on these doctrines? Did they ever spend an hour in a critical examination of the Bible? They know nothing about the doctrines, and they are ignorant of the contents of the Bible. They are ignorant of all the reasons which have been given for believing the Bible; and above all, they are ignorant of that which is in the Bible. They are ignorant of the essential spirit, the nature and the reality of those truths which are imperfectly embodied there. For the truths of the Bible must be experimentally learned. The teachings of the Bible are not clearly defined. The Bible is not like a philosophy or a poem, which is fully wrought out. It is to be tested just as a cook's recipe is, by *trying* it, and not simply by reading it. The Word of God is a book on which men are to build a complete life. If you build in such and such ways, you will come to happiness here and hereafter; but if you build in such and such other ways, you will come to misrule here, and destruction hereafter. A man can put the Bible to proof, not by argument, but by life. You can see what there is in truth, in purity, in love, in justice, in generosity, in magnanimity, by practising them, and not by reasoning upon them. And



yet, how many young men set the Bible aside without proving it—without putting it to trial! How many form their opinion of the Bible, or of sacred things, upon the argument, in a third or fourth rate newspaper, of an ignorant, shallow-pated scribbler! How many men cut loose from their early faith upon no other ground than that of compli-  
ance with the notions which prevail in the circle among whom they move! They talk conceitedly about ministers, and about churches; they criticise Christian people; they laugh to scorn their companions who read the Bible and endeavor to live by its precepts; they set themselves up as superior to all these things, and sometimes they go so far as to mispronounce the names of great authors, and talk about systems of philosophy, and the modern tendencies of religious ideas; and they go through life giving their encouragement to every element that makes a man contemptible, and putting obstacles in the way of every element that makes a man respectable.

There never was a Bible made, there never was a superstition started, that it was not better to believe than to believe nothing. To not believe emasculates a man, and leaves him in a condition in which he is liable to degenerate into all the vices which afflict men. There is nothing that makes a man more mushy, more feeble and worthless, than the not believing anything. That state of mind in which men are floating, in which they do not even speculate; that state of conceit and skepticism and indifference which is so prevalent, is the cause of the destruction of hundreds and thousands of young men.

And, lastly, as the grand climax of life, how conceited must that man be, who, having a price put into his hand to get wisdom; born into a world lighted by so fair a sun, hallowed by scenes that are themselves the creatures of law and the teachers of law; thrown into a society which is organized to make proof of certain great moral truths; living in the midst of influences which are perpetually showing the royalty of the things revealed in Scripture; and with the testimony of holy men innumerable of a faith which points to the other life, and saying, "As a man sows here, so shall he reap there"—how conceited must that man be, who, growing up under all these benefactions of God, can reconcile himself to rising up in the last day, in the presence of his Judge, and saying, "Here, Lord, is the talent which thou gavest me. I knew that thou wert a hard master, reaping where thou hadst not sown; and I have buried my talent in a napkin. Here is that which is thine own!" And how many men there will be that will take all the experience, and instruction, and accumulated wisdom of this life, and despise it in conceit, and make this adventure, risking everything, and rising in the last great day, with the one, or two,

or more talents that God gave them, degenerated, pierced, corrupted, destroyed! Oh! if men could in that last day, say, "Here is that thou gavest me, as thou gavest it to me; oh! if they could carry back the child's sweet simplicity, and his innocence therein, and present them before God, that would be some consolation; but that they should appear before God with their whole soul contorted,—their reason suborned and made false; their conscience perverted; their moral sense death-struck; all their best affections scarred and marred; and their whole life a stupendous folly, a grand mistake, a blunder throughout,—that is too sad to contemplate. Lower than the birds, lower than the insects, lower than the very reptiles, all of whom fulfill the duties of their spheres, lower than the lowest thing, they shall rise and stand before God; and to the demand, "Where are the powers that I entrusted to you?" they will show but the wreck and ruin of themselves. Oh! in that tremendous hour, when they shall rise to shame and everlasting contempt, then, *then*, the Voice from the dark overhanging cloud will descend upon their ear, saying,

"Scest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him."

May God give you wisdom, in all humility, to look unto Jesus, and through Jesus unto God, who giveth liberally to those that lack wisdom, and upbraideth not; who heareth them that cry to him, saying, "Thou art the God of my youth;" those who believe that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom; those who believe that long life and prosperity are to be sought by earnestly seeking God and cleaving unto him.

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### PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

Our Father, we bless thy name that thou hast made thyself known to us; that we behold thee in Jesus our Lord; that so much of thy nature is disclosed in him; that we are so brought near to thee by this, that thou hast been like unto ourselves; *in all points tempted like as we are, and yet without sin*. There is no sorrow on earth the like of which thou hast not felt. All the ways by which temptations come thou hast walked; and there is no soul on which the shadow shall fall darker than it fell on thine. There is no yoke heavier than thy neck did bear; and no spear sharper than that which pierced thy side. Having learned by tasting our lot and experience, having been made a perfect Captain of our salvation, we are encouraged to draw near to thee, in that thou canst succor, and in that thou canst sympathize. And we rejoice that thou hast a fellow feeling. For, although thou wert without sin, thou dost behold those that sin. And thou hast been so near them, and art thyself so full of love, that thou canst have compassion upon those who are out of the way. Thou dost not scorn us because of our wrong-doing. Men who are themselves sinners; men who are from time to time forgiven of God, turn with scorn from their fellow-men, and tread hard upon those who are weak and sinful; but with thee that art pure, without spot or blemish, is mercy and gentleness, and great forbearance. For thou wouldst

not that any should perish. Thou wouldst that all be brought through repentance to salvation. And thou art sparing, thou hast spared in times past. And there are many in thy presence this evening that have provoked thee, that have withstood thee, that have disobeyed thee, that have scorned thee. There are many who have been willing to consume the mercies of God ignobly and requite nothing. They have rejoiced to see the fullness of thine open hand; but thine hand with the sceptre and with law they have despised. And yet, thou hast not forgotten to be gracious to them. Thou causest the sun to rise upon the good and upon the evil; upon the just and upon the unjust. Thou art sending thy bounties to them from day to day.

Oh Lord! we beseech of thee that thy goodness may lead men to repentance; that they may not provoke thee by turning thy goodness into an argument of presumption; that they may not harden themselves, and destroy their own souls, by the very messengers and mercies which were sent for their salvation. We pray that thou wilt give to us to night an open ear, a softness of heart, and an alert conscience. Grant, we pray thee, that there may be some to-night who shall consider their ways and be wise. We pray that thou wilt by thy Spirit move upon the heart; and that thou wilt give the truth a lodgment therein; and that it may be as seed sown in good ground; and that it may spring up and bring forth a hundred fold.

Confirm all that are beginning to walk in the Christian life. Though they seem dimly, and are as little children, may they still persevere, knowing that God will hold them up. If there are any that are surrounded with dangers and temptations more than they are able to bear, strengthen them in the hour of trial. Hold them up by thine own arm, that they may not fall.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt grant that all those who are sitting in darkness and in trouble, and all those whose faith is failing, and who seem to themselves ready to perish without succor, may find thee a present help in time of trouble. Give sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf, and life to the dead. Grant we beseech of thee, that thy mercies may abound, and that all through this great assembly there may be hearts responsive to thy touch, breaking forth into thanksgiving and praise for the wonderful things which the Lord shall do unto them.

We pray that thou wilt grant thy blessing to go forth from church to church, and strengthen the hands of thy servants who preach, and of those that gather together devoutly to serve the Lord. We pray that those may be blessed who go forth to teach others, and visit the neglected, and search out those that need succor. And may the mercy which they bear to others be visited in great abundance upon their own souls.

And we beseech of thee that thy kingdom may come, and thy will be done in all the earth, and the whole world see thy salvation.

We ask it for Christ Jesus' sake. *Amen.*

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### PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Our heavenly Father, we beseech of thee that thou wilt grant thy blessing to rest upon thy word and make it carry light and conviction to those who need it. We pray that thou wilt help all good men to warn those that are imperiled. May we not be content to carry our own light unblown-out, nor to keep our own garments from being soiled. May we seek also to serve others. May we be wise to save them, that we may shine as the stars in the firmament, having turned many to righteousness.

Wilt thou bless us now as we are dismissed. Go home with us. Bless the week. Help us to carry truth and justice into all its duties, and through every hour. And finally, through all the trials of life, bring us at last safely to our eternal home in heaven through riches of grace in Christ Jesus our Lord. *Amen.*



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